

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 587

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 10895

EXDIS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: ENRG PFOR VE

SUBJ: PRESIDENT PEREZ AND THE PANAMA CANAL ISSUE

1. DURING OUR MEETING OCTOBER 19, CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ NOTED THAT HE HAD BEEN ON THE TELEPHONE SEVERAL TIMES RECENTLY WITH GENERAL TORRIJOS. HE SAID THAT THE LATTER IS COMING TO CARACAS THIS WEEK TO CONTINUE THE CONSULTATIONS. ACCORDING TO PRESIDENT PEREZ, TORRIJOS IS DEEPLY TROUBLED BY THE CURRENT STATE OF THE CANAL NEGOTIATIONS AND FEARS "LOSING CONTROL" OVER THE SITUATION IN PANAMA.

2. PRESIDENT PEREZ SAID HE FULLY SHARED THAT PREOCCUPATION. IN HIS VIEW, FAILURE TO REACH AGREEMENT ON THE CANAL WOULD PRODUCE A MAJOR CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND ALL OF LATIN AMERICA. HE ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT HE APPRECIATED THE PROBLEMS WE CONFRONT IN THE CONGRESS AND IN PUBLIC OPINION. PRESIDENT LOPEZ MICHELSEN HAD REPORTED IN DETAIL ON HIS CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT FORD IN WASHINGTON. PEREZ SAID THAT AS A RESULT OF THAT REPORT HE WAS NOW CONVINCED THAT THE ADMINISTRATION GENUINELY WANTS A TREATY AND IS PROCEEDING IN GOOD FAITH. I ASSURED HIM THAT WAS THE CASE. THE PRESIDENT CONCLUDED BY WONDERING ALOUD AS TO HOW HE COULD BEST CONVEY TO OUR CONGRESS HIS OWN SENSE OF THE URGENT AND CRUCIAL NATURE OF THE ISSUE. I REMARKED THAT THE SECOND US-VENEZUELAN SEMINAR PLANNED FOR EARLY NEXT YEAR WOULD GIVE HIM AN OPPORTUNITY IN THAT DIRECTION. SHLAUDEMAN

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